

## Life Story of William Derby Johnson, Sr.

Not much is told of the early childhood of William Derby Johnson, Sr. except that he moved from place to place with his parents and the large family. He lived the normal average life of a boy of that day and age.

His mother joined the church when he was a very small lad. He came to Kirtland, Ohio, with his mother in April 1833 when he was only 10 years old. He was baptized there by Samuel Bent, the church records give the exact date as 9<sup>th</sup> April, 1836. After stopping several years in Springfield, Illinois they then moved to Nauvoo. They went west with the exodus in 1846, but returned and came later in 1849. Because his father did not join the church at the time his mother did, there was quite a bit of confusion and difficulties in the home and a large family to support. They stopped in Kanesville where they lived for several years, before coming on to Utah.

In 1848 he signed a petition in Pottawotamie County, Iowa, to secure a post office in that county. Sometime near 1847 or 1848 he met Jane Cadwalleder Brown who was the daughter of Abia William Brown and Abby Cadwalleder. She was born in Birmingham, Miami County, Ohio on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1832. There is very little known of her early childhood life. Her parents were Quakers and she was a quaint, sweet little Quaker girl, very small, real black hair and eyes. William Derby Johnson fell in love with her and they were married on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of November 1848, probably in Nauvoo when she was just 16 years of age and he was 24.

He adored her and she was his queen all his life. Nothing was ever too good for her. He got her the best of everything, the finest most convenient homes that money could buy and the best that could be built at that time and nearly always had hired help for her.

Though they had a large family of 12 children, she always took much interest in her neatness in dress and appearance. She did all kinds of lovely handwork and sewing and especially making many beautiful quilts. Her work was the neatest and of the very best. Much of the time she wore a neat black taffeta dress and bonnet.

They came to Utah in 1861 and settled in Salt Lake City where they built their first home and store which was located on the spot that the Union Pacific Depot now stands. It seems that wherever he went he had a store where he sold some sort of merchandise. He had operated a store in Florence, Nebraska for a year prior to his coming to the Salt Lake Valley. He was also the postmaster in Florence for a period of two years and also was the Deputy postmaster at Kanesville, Florence, Nebraska. The home they built was of adobe structure which was built on a 10 acre lot. During his life while in the mercantile business, he made trunks and sold them. He sold such things as drugs, medicine (much of it he made himself at home) handled jewelry, and bakery goods (pies and cakes and bread were made by Jane) and many other lines of merchandise. They also owned a large herd of dairy cows, which they milked by hand. It was the duty of two of their children (girls) to milk and make the 50 pounds of cheese each day. They did not do all the work themselves, but oversaw it all. They often had Indians working for them.

In the fall of 1870 they sold the Salt Lake place and moved to ST. George, Utah and from there

moved east to what was to become Johnson, Utah. This town was named Johnson for William Derby and his brothers who came later to settle there. According to his history he arrived there on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1871 with his family which was the first family to settle there. Afterwards his brothers, Joel, Joseph, George W. and Benjamin F came there intending to make a regular Johnson town there. President Brigham Young had advised them to settle this place which had been called Hay Canyon before that time, a very nice place.

Sextus E. Johnson, a nephew of William Derby Johnson Sr. Was appointed as junior supervisor there till he moved to Arizona after which William Derby Johnson, Sr. presided until he moved to Mexico about 1889. He was presiding priest and had no counselors. His wife Jane served as Relief Society president there in 19 April 1877.

William Derby Johnson made some very fine improvements, had a fine garden, flowers, orchard, park, fish pond, and everything in first class condition.

The Johnson Ward was not fully organized until 7 August 1877, a part of the Kanab Stake. It was a small ward and when most of the Johnson brothers and their families went to Mexico the little ward soon fell apart and was disorganized on 8 June 1901. However, some of the old land marks are still there. William Derby Johnson went to Arizona about 1888 and a little later in 1889 moved on to Diaz, Mexico.

A letter appearing in the Deseret News (15 January 1889) says: Bishop Peter A. Lofgreen of St. David Ward in Graham Co., Arizona in the St. Joseph Stake that William Derby Johnson was one of his counselors at that time. A note in church history relates that William Derby Johnson Sr. was rebaptized 13 August 1881 by his son William Derby Johnson, Jr. and was reconfirmed the same day by him.

His son William Derby Johnson, Jr. went to Mexico in the early 1880's to live and was made bishop of the Diaz, Chihuahua county, Mexico Ward in 1886. His history notes differ on the dates. Some places say he went to Mexico in 1889 and in another place it states that it was the fall of 1890. He settled in Colonia Diaz, Chihuahua County, Mexico where his son lived. His wife sold their property for \$50,000 and joined him there where they built a fine home (his notes say) Diaz, Mexico, 21<sup>st</sup> September 1890 that he now owns the finest house in the colony. William Derby Johnson Sr. was ordained a high priest in Diaz, Mexico on 27<sup>th</sup> March 1894. He was ordained a patriarch the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 1895 by Francis M. Lyman in Colonial Diaz, Mexico.

He was a quiet, stern man and complied with his wife's every wish, one of which was that he did not go into polygamy though he did have one other girl sealed to him, he never lived with anyone except his beloved wife, Jane. They were a very energetic couple and very generous. No one ever went hungry or without a bed around him. He was a very humble man and never wanted his good deeds talked about at all. Both he and his wife were very kind and conservative. They never wanted to be called on to speak in church, yet was in the lead when it came to helping with church buildings and etc. He paid his tithing and church donations very faithfully. He was a leader in building up the communities in which he lived and tended strictly to his own business. He taught his family to be strictly honest and kept his word good always.

He was very strict about being on time and when he told his children to do a thing, they knew he really meant it.

He died in Colonia Diaz, Chihuahua, Mexico on 13 April 1896 of stoppage of the kidneys and old age at the age of 72. Everyone in the town was at his funeral. He was buried in Diaz, Mexico as was his wife, Jane, who died 19 January 1908, twelve years after her husband. William Derby Johnson Sr. expressed the desire that he did not want to be buried in a casket covered with cloth as he wanted a stained wood casket. But when he died they were unable to find such a casket or a wood to take a stain; so they covered it with a black velvet. Zeno Martel Johnson drove the team on a spring delivery wagon with William Derby Johnson, Sr.'s body to the cemetery in Colonia Diaz. He said the wind was blowing terrible that day in April.

William Derby Johnson, Sr. and his wife, Jane Dadwalleder Brown, were a kind couple and a remarkable one, long to be remembered by their many relatives and friends who knew them.

An interesting experience he tells while coming from Council Bluffs, Iowa with a load of merchandise for his store either in Salt Lake or Parowan. He had left Council Bluff and was traveling along the dirt road. It was midday when he came across a man walking along the side of the road. William Derby stopped and ask him to get in and ride with him. The little man accepted and climbed up in the seat beside him. The stranger said to him, "You are planning on camping at this certain spot tonight and he told William Derby Johnson not to camp there as he had planned to, but to change his plans as there would be trouble with the Indians that night. He also gave him some other advice. The strange man was average or small and had a black beard and whiskers. He finally ask to get out, and when he stopped and let the stranger down from the wagon he bid him good day. He then turned back to the stranger to inquire as to his name or where he had come from or where he was going but to his amazement he was nowhere in sight. He then realized that the man must be one of the three Nephites. He was very kind, gently and helpful and disappeared as suddenly as he had come.

Later he found out that the very spot he had planned to camp had been attacked by Indians. Some other immigrants had camped in the spot he had intended on camping himself that night but following the advice of the stranger had camped elsewhere. The immigrants who had camped there that night were all slaughtered and burned out by the Indians.

William Derby Johnson, Sr. was given a most wonderful patriarchal blessing by John Smith on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1844. The original copy of which is in our possession.